1. The Heterogeneity Problem

On May 6 1643, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia picked up her pen and wrote her first letter to René Descartes. The question that she poses to Descartes is one of the most devastating critiques, if not the most, of his metaphysics: How can a thinking substance, the human mind, bring about voluntary actions in a material substance, the human body? This was not the first time that Descartes had heard this question. Pierre Gassendi, in the Fifth Objections to the Meditations, raises just this worry, asking Descartes to explain how “the corporeal can communicate with the incorporeal,” and, moreover, of “what relationship may be established between the two” (AT VII.345/CSM II.239).

The objection raised by Elisabeth and Gassendi has come to be known as the “heterogeneity problem,” which arises when we wonder how two wholly heterogeneous substances can causally interact in any meaningful way. Descartes’s response to Gassendi is that the whole problem contained in such questions arises simply from a supposition that is false and cannot in any way be proved, namely that, if the soul and the body are two substances whose nature is different, this prevents them from being able to act on each other. And yet, those who admit the existence of real accidents like heat, weight and so on, have no doubt that these accidents can act on the body; but there is much more of a difference between them and it, i.e. between accidents and substance, than there is between two substances. (AT IX.1.213/CSM II.275–6)

1. Though, as Lisa Shapiro notes, Descartes’s engagement with Elisabeth’s posing of the question is much friendlier than his response to the first time he heard it (2007: 63, note 7).
3. I focus here on Descartes’s response in the Appendix to the Fifth Objections and Replies.
As Margaret Wilson notes, Descartes’s response to Gassendi “puts the burden of proof on those who want to make the heterogeneity objection stick” and that Descartes’s critics, including Elisabeth and Gassendi, fail “to make clear why exactly ‘heterogeneity’ is supposed to preclude interaction” (Wilson 1991: 298). The questions of whether Descartes did or did not hold that heterogeneous substances cannot interact, whether he held a consistent position on this point, and how much he worried about this particular problem are not my concern here. Instead, I wish to examine a heretofore ignored critic of Descartes who tries to relieve Wilson’s burden of proof for thinkers who take the heterogeneity problem to be devastating for the Cartesian program: Anton Wilhelm Amo. Looking at Amo’s critique of Descartes reveals a very clear case of a thinker who attempts to offer a causal system that is not a solution to the mind-body problem, but rather one that transcends it.⁴

The focus of my discussion is Amo’s 1734 dissertation: The Apathy [ἀπάθεια] of the Human Mind or The Absence of Sensation and the Faculty of Sense in the Human Mind and their Presence in our Organic and Living Body (hereafter, Apathy). Amo’s discussion of the interaction, or lack thereof, of the mind and body hinges on the essential feature he identifies for the human mind — apathy, that is, impassivity.⁵ In this work, Amo engages explicitly with Descartes’s writing, which allows us to more precisely see the nature of his agreement and disagreement with the Cartesian metaphysics of mind. But this text is by no means merely a commentary on Descartes’s view. As we shall see, Amo develops his own metaphysics of mind founded on the very point on which he disagrees with Descartes: the apathy of the human mind. In this sense, the treatment of Descartes serves as the springboard for the elaboration of Amo’s view.

I proceed by treating Amo’s five stated criteria for spirit-hood which, in turn, reveal the kinds of causal connections that are possible for embodied spirits on his view. My aim is threefold: (1) To lay out what I take to be Amo’s view of and arguments for the five criteria he takes to be required for a substance to be spirit. (2) To locate Amo’s agreement and disagreement with Descartes. This task is not straightforward, for it is not always clear what Amo intends, or even to what content in a particular piece of work he means to draw our attention when he makes reference to Descartes’s works. So some speculation is required. (3) To suggest that Amo’s view on mind-body interaction involves a kind of occasional causation.

I meet these aims in tandem through my discussion of the five criteria for spirit, which Amo defines as:

- whatever substance is (1) purely active, (2) immaterial, (3) always gains understanding through itself (i.e. directly), and (4) acts from self-motion and (5) with intention, in regard of an end and goal of which it is conscious to itself. (I.i.1: 66, enumeration added)⁷

For Amo, then, for a substance to qualify as a spirit, it must fulfill these five criteria. Four of the five criteria receive detailed treatment. The one that is only superficially discussed is the second, immateriality, hence, freedom from, or insensibility to, passion or feeling; passionless existence.”

⁵. Amo was an 18th century Ghanaian philosopher. He wrote four treatises (that we know of): one on political philosophy and race (which is lost), two on metaphysics, and one on logic. He spent the majority of his academic career at the universities of Halle, Wittenberg, and Jena. For more on Amo’s life, see: Sutherland (2016: 11); Smith (2015: 209–11); Mabe 2014; Wiedu 2004; Hill 2003; Abraham 1996; Bess 1989; Sephocele 1982; Hountondji 1970; Lochner 1958.
⁶. ‘Apathy’ takes two related but importantly different definitions. Its second definition, given by the OED, is the one most commonly intended by our contemporary usage of the term: ‘Indolence of mind, indifference to what is calculated to move the feelings, or to excite interest or action.’ In other words, a kind of laziness or even negligence. The OED gives as its first definition the one that Amo intends here: ‘Freedom from, or insensibility to, suffering;
⁷. All direct quotations from Apathy are drawn from the 1968 Martin Luther University translation. I have also benefitted from consulting a draft of a new translation of Apathy, prepared by Justin Smith and Stephen Menn, as well as the original Latin in Amo 2010.
which is taken as an obvious feature of spirit-hood. Amo writes that “spirit is immaterial, i.e. neither in its essence nor in its properties does it include anything material.” The reason for this is that “contrary opposites mutually exclude each other in genus, species, and name” (I.i.1: 69). He thus takes it as given that spirit and matter mutually exclude one another, which, on his dualist picture, means that spirit must be immaterial.

Let us look in detail at how Amo explains each of the remaining four criteria.

Criterion 1: Pure activity
To defend this essential feature of the human mind, Amo provides three proofs. It is here that the case against the interaction of heterogeneous substances is made. He writes:

I call spirit a substance which is purely active; the same as if you should say spirit admits of no passivity in itself.

If spirit should be said to feel, that is, admit passivity in itself, this could only happen either through communication, or through penetration, or finally through contact. (I.i.1: 67)

He elaborates:

By communication I understand the following: when the parts, properties, and effects of one being through the agency of some act become present in another being which is suitable and comparable.

By penetration, I understand the passage of one being through the parts of another object through the agency of some act.

8. The Martin Luther has “identity of designation” where I have “name.” The Latin phrase reads: “…quia contrarie opposite ab invicem excludunt, genus, speciem et eandem denominationem.”
Argument from Contact

1. Substance A has contact with substance B if and only if their “surfaces touch each other at some physical or sensible point.” (By definition)

2. Substance A can only have contact with substance B if both A and B have at least one physical or sensible point. (From 1)

3. Therefore, contact can only occur between A and B if A and B are the same kind of substance, namely, a substance that possesses at least one physical or sensible point. (From 1 and 2)

Accepting that these three kinds of interaction — communication, penetration, and contact — exhaust the ways that substances can be acted upon, and thus be said to “admit passivity,” then these three arguments entail that spirit cannot be so acted upon. To show this, Amo provides three proofs that demonstrate the heterogeneity problem. For all three proofs, I will first give Amo’s text, followed by my reconstruction of the argument. First, communication:

No spirit either by itself or by accident receives material and sensible parts, properties, and effects, for it is opposed in a contrary way to a sensible being and among contrary opposites no communication is possible. (I.i.1: 67)

Proof from Communication

1. Substance A communicates with substance B if and only if the parts, properties, and effects of A become present in B. (By definition)
Third, contact:

I say thirdly that it neither senses nor is affected through contact; for whatever touches and is touched is body... there is contact when two surfaces touch each other at some physical point. But neither a sensible point nor a surface can be predicated of spirit; therefore neither can passivity to the extent that it can happen through contact. (I.i.1: 68)

Proof from Contact

1. Substance A has contact with substance B if and only if their "surfaces touch each other at some physical or sensible point." (By definition)

2. Substance A can only have contact with substance B if both A and B have at least one physical or sensible point. (From 1)

3. Suppose that substance A is spiritual and substance B is material.

4. Substance A does not have any physical parts. (By definition)

5. Contact cannot occur between A and B. (From 1–4)

6. Therefore, a spiritual substance cannot be said to be acted upon by contact. (From 1–5)

When discussing the proof from contact (and though he does not say so explicitly, presumably the contact requirement would also hold for interaction by penetration), Amo concludes that "whatever touches and is touched is body." It is in support of this point that he first references Descartes. Amo cites the partial phrase: "First, I shall say to you, etc.," from Descartes's correspondence (I.i.1: 68). The reference is to a letter written by Descartes in March or April of 1648. There, after the line that Amo quotes, Descartes writes that there is a fixed quantity of motion in created matter, which never increases or decreases. While Descartes does not explicitly state "whatever touches and is touched is body" in this letter, he writes that "when a body makes another body move, it loses as much of its movement as it gives to the other body" (AT V.135/CSMK 330). We can see how Amo might reasonably infer the statement about touch, that is, contact, being required for such a transfer given the example that Descartes uses to illustrate his point. Descartes writes: "When a stone falls to the earth from above, if it stops and does not rebound, I think that this is because it moves [ébranle] the earth, and thus transfers to it its motion" (AT V.135/CSMK 330). In this example, contact is illustrated as occurring between two bodies, a stone and the ground. Amo takes Descartes's letter to show that "there is contact when two surfaces touch each other at some physical point" (I.i.1: 68).

I take it that Amo’s objective in referring to Descartes here is to set up for his eventual articulation of what he takes to be Descartes’s ultimately inconsistent position. Amo seems to take this letter as evidence that Descartes thinks that contact occurs only between bodies. And, as we will see in a moment, Amo calls attention to Descartes’s inconsistency on this very point.

9. The recipient of this letter is uncertain. In the Clerelier edition, neither name nor date is recorded. The AT notes that there is reason to believe that the recipient was the Duke of Newcastle, William Cavendish, husband of the philosopher Margaret Cavendish. The CSMK gives the recipient as Jean de Silhon (330). In Apathy, Amo cites Epistole, part III, Amsterdam 1683, no. 114, p. 420. The letter is at AT V.133/CSMK 330.

10. While the content of the letter does strongly suggest that whatever touches and is touched is a body, it must be noted that Descartes does not there assert that contact occurs only between bodies.
Because penetration and contact require physical parts, it is impossible for spiritual substances to be acted upon by penetration or contact by another substance. However, interaction by communication between spirits remains an open possibility on Amo’s system. When considering what kind of causal system underlies the union of mind and body, the Proof from Communication\(^*\) reveals that it is at least possible that Amo may hold that there is a communication of properties or effects between God, who is spirit, and the human mind, which is also spirit. Looking at the fourth criterion for spirit-hood, which I will call spontaneity, we see further evidence of Amo’s system being friendly to this kind of communication.

**Criterion 4: Spontaneity**

Amo takes spirits to be self-determining. By this, he means that they determine their own operations and that they are not “compelled from some other source into acting.” He writes,

> If spirit were forced from elsewhere, this would be possible either by the agency of some other thinking spirit or matter. If it is compelled by some other spirit, then in both cases spontaneity or freedom of action remains preserved, as does also the faculty of response. If spirit were however compelled by matter, this of course could not happen, since spirit is by definition purely active, but matter is always passive, and receives unto itself all the action of an agent in itself active. (I.i.1: 68)

We can formalize Amo’s comment in the following way:

**Argument from External Compulsion**

1. If a spirit were compelled by something external to itself, then it would be so compelled either by another spirit or a body. (By definition of dualism)

11. This possibility is raised by Krause, who, for reasons that are not clear to me, seems to reject it on the basis of Amo’s dualism (2009: 152).
2. If a spirit were compelled by another spirit, “then in both cases spontaneity or freedom of action remains preserved, as does also the faculty of response.” (From Proof from Communication*)

3. If a spirit were compelled by matter, then a purely active substance (spirit) would be acted upon by a passive substance (matter). (By definition)

4. A spirit cannot be compelled by matter, that is, be acted upon by a material substance, because spirit is by definition purely active and cannot be communicated with, penetrated by, or in contact with another heterogeneous substance. (From Proofs from Communication, Penetration, and Contact)

5. Therefore, a spirit cannot be not compelled by something external to it, just in the case that that thing is material. (From 1–4)

Amo’s central point here, as above in the demonstrations of the pure activity of spirit, is to show that spirit cannot be acted upon. Of great interest in this argument is premise 2. I take it that the reason Amo holds premise 2 is on the basis of what I have called the Proof from Communication*. The conclusion of this proof is that one spirit can communicate with, that is, be acted upon by another without thereby losing its activity. Here, premise 2 seems to suggest that such communication can even be considered a compulsion without compromising the criterion of self-determination of the spirit being acted upon. This means that, for Amo, it would be possible, for instance, for God to communicate a property or effect to the human mind, and thereby compel it to act, and for the human mind to preserve its status as both purely active and self-determining. This possibility would be consistent with a kind of occasional causation. I return to this point below.

Criterion 3: Understanding Per Se
Amo states that a spirit must always understand through itself; it “always thinks per se.” Spirit is, he writes, “conscious of itself to itself, of its own operations, and also of other things” (I.i.1: 68). He begins his explanation by drawing a distinction between human minds on one hand, and the mind of God and “other unincarnate spirits,” presumably angels, on the other. He states that while he is ignorant of how God and these other spirits have knowledge of themselves, their operations, and other things, he doubts that such knowledge is acquired through ideas (I.i.1: 68). An idea, for Amo, is “the instantaneous action of our mind, by which it represents to itself things perceived before through the senses and sensory organs, or causes them to be present.” In contrast with the human mind, God and “other unincarnate spirits” do not know by ideas. Amo gives two reasons for this. First, they do not sense in virtue of not having “sensory organs, and an organic living body” (I.i.1: 68). Thus, they have no need to represent ideas of such sensations to themselves. Second, Amo takes representation to be impossible for God. He writes that

in God, representation is impossible, for otherwise there would occur in God a representation of future, past, and in general of absent things, whereas in God there is no such knowledge as that of the past of the future, or in general of absent things. (I.i.1: 68)

He explains that all things are immediately present to God’s knowledge, making representation otiose. For, representation “presupposes the absence of what must be represented” (I.i.1: 68). And so,

God and the other spirits have knowledge of themselves, their actions, and other things entirely without any ideation, or ideas and recalled sensation, but our own mind knows and operates through ideas on account of the very tight link and commerce with the body. (I.i.1: 68)

12. The entire phrase in Latin reads: “Sequitur igitur exinde Deum aliosque

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Let us call this the Argument from Sensory Perception:

1. Ideas represent sensory perceptions. (By definition)

2. An organic, living body with sensory organs is required in order to have sensory perceptions. (By definition)

3. Spirits without bodies do not have sensory perceptions. (From 2)

4. Spirits without bodies do not have ideas. (From 1 and 3)

5. Therefore, spirits without bodies know by something other than ideas. (From 4)

6. Spirits that are united to bodies have sensory perceptions. (By definition)

7. Therefore, spirits that are united to bodies can know by ideas. (From 1, 2, and 6)

Thus, in virtue of being joined to a body, Amo shows that it is at least possible that the human mind acquires its knowledge by ideas. That the human mind in fact does acquire knowledge through ideas is clear when we consider what Amo has said about representation in his remarks, given above, on the difference between the way that unincarnate spirits and embodied spirits know.

Argument from Representation:

1. Ideas represent content to the mind. (By definition)

What Amo suggests here is that spirits that are human minds, in virtue of their embodied state, require ideas to know not just what is going on in the body, but also to know themselves and their own operations. In other words, Amo’s view seems to be that for any incarnate spirit, ideas are required for all knowledge, and these ideas are related in an important way to bodily sensation. I take Amo to be advancing two central points in his discussion of this criterion. First, that the organic, living body is essential for the ideation that occurs in the embodied mind. Second, that the ideation itself is not caused by the body, but rather that it happens “on account of the tight link and commerce”
with it. The criterion of understanding per se implies that the mind *is itself* the cause of its ideas — recall that Amo states that in ideation, it is the mind that “causes them [ideas] to be present” (I.i: 68).

At this point in his discussion, Amo approvingly cites three letters from Descartes’s correspondence. The first letter is from Descartes to Pierre Chanut, dated 6 June 1647. This letter deals with questions raised of Descartes by Queen Christina of Sweden, by way of Chanut. Among her questions is the following, which relates to Amo’s point about the “tight link” between the mind and body: What is the “secret impulse” (*impulsion secrète*) that drives us to love one person rather than another, even before we know their merit (AT V.21)? Descartes answers by way of his theory of animal spirits and brain traces: Objects strike our senses, which activate our nerves, which, in turn, move the brain, creating brain folds or traces. In the future, “the place where they [the folds] were made has a tendency to be folded again in the same manner by another object resembling even incompletely the original object” (AT V.57/CSMK 322). Descartes gives the following anecdote as an example:

When I was a child I loved a little girl of my own age who had a slight squint. The impression made by sight in my brain when I looked at her cross-eyes became so closely connected to the simultaneous impression which aroused in me the passion of love that for a long time afterwards when I saw persons with a squint I felt a special inclination to love them simply because they had that defect. At the time I did not know that was the reason for my love; and indeed as soon as I reflected on it and recognized

that it was a defect, I was no longer affected by it. (AT V.57/CSMK 322)

Descartes is here describing the notion of internal senses, namely, the passions. In his anecdote, love can be explained on the basis of the mechanical account for how sensation stimulates the brain, which can, in turn, affect our reactions to future, similar perceptions. Moreover, he suggests that reflecting on an inclination can result in a change of brain traces which, in turn, can change the response to the relevant stimulus. In short, Descartes is giving one example of how the body (brain traces) is linked to the mind, and the mind (reflection) is linked to the body. I take Amo’s reference to this letter to be his way of underlining his agreement with Descartes about the fact of the mind-body union — sensory stimulus affects the mind, and mental reflection affects the body. Thus, there is a union. Amo might also be signaling his approval of a position that is implied in Descartes’s anecdote: The disembodied mind, the mind with no impression and thus no representation of the little girl, would not experience the passion of love as described.

The second letter that Amo mentions is from Descartes to Princess Elisabeth, dated 21 May 1643. This is the first letter that Descartes writes to Elisabeth, and its contents are intended to answer the question she poses of him in her first letter, penned two weeks earlier:

So I ask you please to tell me how the soul of a human being (it being only a thinking substance) can determine the bodily spirits, in order to bring about voluntary actions. For it seems that all determination of movement happens through the impulsion of the thing moved, by the manner in which it is pushed by that which moves it,

See footnote 12 for the Latin phrase.


Chanut was the French ambassador to Sweden, and mediated, at least initially, the correspondence between Descartes and the Queen.

The other topic of discussion between them in this particular exchange is the size of the universe, which has no obvious connection to Amo’s focus here.
or else by the particular qualities and shape of the surface of the latter. Physical contact is required for the first two conditions, extension for the third. You entirely exclude the one [extension] from the notion you have of the soul, and the other [physical contact] appears to me incompatible with an immaterial thing. (AT III.661/S 62)

Amo’s reference at this point in his discussion to Descartes’s response to this letter is curious. For, in his response to Elisabeth, Descartes states that “all the knowledge we have of its [the human soul’s] nature depends” on both the fact that it is a thing that thinks, and that “being united to the body, it can act on and be acted upon by it” (AT III.664/CSMK 217–8/S 64–5). Amo certainly agrees that the mind and body are in union, but we know that he utterly rejects the notion that the soul acts on or is acted upon by the body. And indeed, a few paragraphs later, Amo refers to this same letter, and cites the very line quoted above in order to state his disagreement with Descartes (II.1: 73).

In registering his disagreement, Amo writes “that the mind acts with the body with which it is in mutual union, we concede; but that it suffers with the body, we deny” (II.1: 73). I take it that Amo refers to this letter when discussing spirit’s ability to understand through itself in order to note that he agrees with Descartes on two points: The mind is a thinking thing, and the mind is in union with the body. However, Amo disagrees with Descartes, and indeed thinks Descartes runs into inconsistency when he adds that this union entails that the mind acts on and is acted upon by the body. For, as Amo has understood Descartes, to act or be acted upon requires contact, which requires body.

Later in his discussion, Amo bolsters his critique of Descartes on this point with a reference to the Comments on a Certain Broadsheet (hereafter, Broadsheet). Descartes wrote this text in response to a broadsheet penned by Henricus Regius, his erstwhile pupil and supporter. The topic of the dispute between Regius and Descartes is the nature of human mind. Amo points out that in the Broadsheet, Descartes writes that “the rational soul consists solely in thought, that is, in the faculty of thinking or the internal principle by means of which we think” (AT VIIIb.347/CSM I 296). Amo notes that Descartes “openly contradicts himself” because “thinking is an activity of the mind, not a passion” (II.1: 73). It is not obvious what Amo intends here. Descartes does not state, in the Broadsheet or elsewhere, that thought is a passion. But what Amo is surely getting at is the contradiction he sees between Descartes’s statement that the soul consists solely in the faculty of thought and his statement to Elisabeth that, as Amo puts it, the soul “moves and feels with” the body (II.1: 73). If the soul consists solely in thought and the soul can “feel with” the body, that is, experience a passion, then we might think that thought is a passion. For, if the soul consists solely in the faculty of thought, and the soul can feel, then we might think that thought is felt, and is thus a passion. To suggest that thought is a passion is a contradiction because thought is an activity.

Returning to the criterion of understanding per se, we must pause to consider the consequences of accepting Amo’s critique of Descartes here. If we accept that there is a tight link, but no causal interaction, between mind and body, because the mind is wholly active and the body wholly passive, it is difficult to see how the mind can understand itself, its actions, and other things through itself while at the same time knowing everything through ideas, which seems causally dependent on sensation. In what would the tight link consist? One possible causal story could involve the communication of properties

19. Amo cites Epistolae, part I, letter 99, which is Descartes’s Notae in programma quoddam, sub finem anni 1647. The text is found at AT VIIIb.341/CSM I 294.

20. Amo notes that he sees the same contradictions in Daniel Sennert (1651: 629), Jean Le Clerc (1710: 134), George Daniel Coschwiz (1741: 196, and following), Hermann Friedrich Teichmeyer (1717: 18), and Johann Christoff Sturm (1697: 65). Amo registers that he takes himself to be in agreement with the Aristotelians on this point (II.1: 73). As Smith and Menn note in their draft translation of Apathy, while Amo does not mention Georg Ernst Stahl in Apathy, Coschwiz closely follows Stahl in describing sensation as an act of the rational soul. For discussion of how Amo’s writing may be seen as anti-Stahlian, see Smith (2015: 213–20). For Stahl’s view more generally, see Geyer-Kordes 1990. For discussion of Stahl’s influence on 18th century German philosophy, see Grote (forthcoming).
or effects between God and the human mind (Proof from Communication*), which, in turn, could compel the mind to generate the appropriate ideas. There is some (admittedly) speculative evidence that Amo might have this kind of causation in mind. The evidence comes in the third of the three of Descartes’s letters that Amo references in his discussion of the criterion of understanding per se.

Amo’s reference to this third letter requires comment. For, the letter is not written by Descartes. Its author is Claude Clerselier, and its recipient is Louis de La Forge.21 The names of both the author and recipient are clearly marked on the page. The date of the letter is also clearly indicated — 4 December 1660 — ten years after Descartes’s death. How might we explain the fact that Amo refers to this as a letter written by Descartes himself? One possibility is that Amo’s reading of the text was hasty, which led to the misattribution of authorship.22 Another possibility is that Amo includes the letter in his discussion as a nod to the causal system he endorses. In the letter in question, Clerselier outlines his view on the action of the mind on the body.23 He notes that while we certainly know that the mind and body are linked in some way, we do not know how. Clerselier writes:

Because there is no rapport or affinity between the properties of the one [body] and the other [mind], that is, between the motions of the body and the thoughts of the mind, the union that is between them can have no other cause than the will of He who joined and united them, and there is nothing but experience alone that teaches us what this union is. (Lettres: 646)

Amo certainly agrees with the statement of the heterogeneity of properties between the mind and body, as well as the fact of their union. And, as suggested by Proof from Communication*, Amo seems open to the possibility of the human mind being acted upon by God. If God communicates spiritual properties or effects to the human mind on the occasion of particular sensations, which in turn compel the mind to generate ideas, then it might also be the case that the human mind can maintain its ability to understand through itself. Amo’s use of this letter as support for his view could indicate that he sees himself as elaborating a position that is squarely in line with a broadly Cartesian view elaborated by a well-known Cartesian, if not the view he understood to be Descartes’s own.24 We cannot know for sure whether Amo’s error in attributing this letter to Descartes was the result of carelessness or a more considered gesture towards a causal view that he finds compelling. It is clear, however, that Amo cites the letter approvingly, which gives us reason to believe that he holds that divine will is the cause of the link between the motions of the body and the thoughts of the mind. The role of divine will in the mind-body union becomes important in Amo’s discussion of the final criterion of spirit-hood — intention.

Criterion 5: Acting with Intention
Amo holds that spirits act with intention. He writes,

Spirit acts from an intention i.e. from a precognition of the object which ought to happen and of the end which it intends to achieve by its operation.25

For in this consists the nature of activity, that a being operates rationally and from knowledge. (I.i.1: 69).

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22. Such an error might not seem atypical in light of the fact that Amo was writing his thesis. It is unlikely that either he or his examiners expected the text to have broad readership, and so such a mistake might have gone uncorrected.

23. Clerselier does not seem to think that there is much difference between his view and La Forge’s, but see Sangiacomo for discussion (2014: 70, note 6).

24. I thank Eric Stencil for this suggestion.

25. The Martin Luther translation omits the “i.e.” I follow Smith and Menn here, who restore the “i.e.” in their translation. The Latin reads: “Spiritus operatur ex intentione i.e. ex praecognitione rei quae fieri debet finisque quem sua operatione consequit intendit.”
If a being is active, then it operates rationally and from knowledge. And, to act rationally and from knowledge is to act with an intention. We can formalize this Argument from Rational Action in the following way:

1. If a being is active, then it operates rationally and from knowledge. (By definition)
2. Acting rationally and from knowledge is to act with an intention. (By definition)
3. To act with an intention is to act with a “precognition” of both the object which ought to happen and the end targeted by the action. (By definition)
4. Acting rationally and from knowledge is to act with a “precognition” of both the object which ought to happen and the end targeted by the action. (From 2 and 3)
5. An active being acts with a “precognition” of both the object which ought to happen and the end targeted by the action. (From 1 and 4)
6. An active being is spirit (Implied by criterion 1)
7. Therefore, spirit acts with a “precognition” of both the object which ought to happen and the end targeted by the action. (From 5 and 6)

Amo states that two consequences follow from the criterion of acting with intention: (1) for something to be an efficient cause it must have self-knowledge, knowledge of its own operations, and knowledge of the ends of its operations, and (2) any being that is an efficient cause is spirit (I.i.1: 69). We can formalize these points in the following way:

1. To be an efficient cause is to have self-knowledge, knowledge of its own operations, and knowledge of the ends of its operations. (By definition)

Let us look first at the conclusion at number 7: What might Amo mean by “precognition” in this discussion? Justin Smith has suggested that Amo’s use of “precognition” brings Leibniz to mind. Smith writes that Amo situated his view “within a broadly Leibnizian theory according to which mind and body harmoniously run on two distinct tracks, so to speak, while all the states of the body unfold from entirely mechanical causes” (2015: 221; see also Nwala (1978: 163)). Smith notes that Amo’s employment of “precognition” seems close to how Leibniz describes “the succession of states of the mind” that unfold “not as a result of changes in the body, but rather as a result of consciousness, or perhaps also subconscious perception, of ends” (Smith 2015: 223).

Smith also asserts that it is Amo’s view that spirit is not influenced from the outside, either by spirit or another material body (2015: 222). There is, however, reason to think that while Amo and Leibniz share the project of explaining how ideas become present to the mind without appealing to efficient causal interaction with the body, the explanations they offer are different. First, as we saw above, Amo in fact leaves open the very un-Leibnizian possibility of spirit being communicated with and even compelled by, and thus acted upon, another spirit. Second, unlike Leibniz, Amo does not appear to hold, or at least does not anywhere suggest, that minds are closed systems and contain something like innate blueprints for all their states. This suggests that Amo’s view of precognition is not identical to the role of conscious or...
subconscious perceptions in Leibniz. Finally, Amo assigns the body a much more causally robust role in ideation than does Leibniz. Where Leibniz’s pre-established harmony has, as Smith puts it in the quoted text above, mind and body running on two distinct tracks with no causal interaction of any kind, Amo appears to confer the status of occasional cause to sensory experience.

In order to see that Amo advances a system of occasional causation for ideation, let us begin by recalling number 10 in the Argument from Rational Action above: Efficient causes are spirits, which act rationally and from knowledge of themselves, their operations, and their ends. Of what does Amo take the mind to be an efficient cause? A direct answer to this question is offered in a later work by Amo, the 1737 *Treatise on the Art of Soberly and Accurately Philosophizing* (hereafter *Treatise*).

There, he states that the mind is the “efficient cause of ideas” (IV.iii.5: 67). Recall that in his discussion of understanding per se, Amo defines an idea as “the instantaneous action of our mind, by which it represents to itself things perceived before through the senses and sensory organs, or causes them to be present” (I.i.1: 68). That the mind’s ideas are dependent, in some sense, on a prior sensation of the body is further suggested by Amo’s statements in the *Treatise* that “there is nothing in the intellect…which has not previously been in the senses” (IV.iii.2: 66) and that “there is no intellection or idea without an archetype perceptible to the senses” (IV.iv.3: 68–9). Amo assigns sensory experience the role of “mediate” or “indispensable” cause of ideas (IV.iii.5: 67). Given this essential causal role of the body, it seems that Amo’s explanation for how ideas become present to the mind is better understood as one of occasional causation than pre-established harmony.

On this model, which I will call Active Mind Occasional Causation, sensory experience provides the occasion for the mind to exert an efficient causal power to produce an idea.

It is important to distinguish occasional causation from the better known occasionalism. As Steven Nadler helpfully defines it, occasional causation is a relationship that “does not require any substantial likeness between cause and effect, and does not involve any kind of influx or communication” (1994: 39). Occasionalism, one kind of occasional causation, is the view that God is the sole efficient causal power, meaning that all finite, created things are mere secondary or occasional causes. But there are other kinds of non-occasionalist occasional causal models where interacting minds and bodies do “constitute a real causal relationship,” which means that there is “an ‘influence’ of cause upon effect, but not of a transeunt efficient nature” (Nadler 1994: 39). Given the efficient causal status he assigns to the mind, Amo would not endorse occasionalism. The more general theory of occasional causation is a better candidate for his system. Given the nature of the dependence of the intellect on the senses for its content, it seems that, for Amo, a real causal relationship, if not a transeunt efficient causal one, is required between mind and body. But even on this model, the non-arbitrary relationship between a sensory experience (the occasional cause) and the content of the idea (the effect) produced by the mind (the efficient cause) must be explained. As Nadler 1994 shows, historically, such explanations are given in terms of laws grounded in divine will. Amo does not offer any explicit discussion of such divine laws. But recall the letter from Clereslier to La Forge that Amo cites in his discussion of criterion 3 above. There, Clereslier names divine will as the cause of the union between the motions of the body and the thoughts of the mind. Given that Amo cites this letter approvingly, there is at least some reason to believe that he takes divine will to ground the union. Moreover, at the outset of the *Treatise*, Amo states

28. Egbeke Aja claims that the assertion that whatever is in the intellect was first in the senses is a straightforward endorsement of a Lockean-style argument in favor of empiricism, thus throwing Amo’s system into inconsistency: ‘Amo while criticising the empiricist notion of ideas was as empiricist as those he criticised’ (1990: 20). Amo’s view cannot be straightforwardly Lockean, however, because, unlike Locke, Amo is clear that bodies cannot causally affect minds.

29. Descartes has been read as holding mind-body and body-mind occasional causation (see Nadler 1994: 47–51). As we have seen, Amo seems to read Descartes’s assertion that the mind affects and is affected by the body in strongly efficient causal terms.
that intelligent substances, that is, God and human minds, ‘act in accordance with order’ (Li: 34). This suggests that Amo takes the action of all intelligent substances, which would include the action of the human mind that makes ideas present to it, to be guided by some nomological principle.

While it might seem a strange view, the Active Mind Occasional Causation explanation for how ideas are made present to the human mind was not uncommon in the Cartesian tradition.30 For example, while perhaps not representative of his considered view, in the Broad-sheet (which, as we saw above, is cited by Amo), Descartes seems to deny that sense organs transmit ideas to the mind. Instead, he suggests that sense organs transmit something that occasions the mind to form ideas “by means of the faculty innate to it” (AT VIIIB.358/CSM I 314).31 Versions of this view are also found in Antoine Arnauld’s and Pierre Nicole’s La Logique ou l’art de penser (the so-called Port-Royal Logic), as well as in Louis de La Forge’s Traité de l’esprit de l’homme (Treatise on the Human Mind).32 Indeed, a thinker as prominent (in his own time) as Nicolas Malebranche critiques this model of ideation in the course of his defense of his own theory of ideas.33

30. The Cartesians were by no means the first to engage with this model of ideation, which received critical treatment from the Scholastics through the medieval period. See Connell (1967: 101–45).

31. This occasional causal explanation for how ideas become present to the mind is in tension with, for example, the way Descartes explains the genesis of adventitious ideas in the Meditations. See Nadler 1991 for discussion. There may also be questions about the consistency between Descartes’s appeal to innateness here as an “innate faculty” and his discussion of innate ideas in the Meditations. For a good overview of the state of the literature on this question, see Smith (2018: §3). For discussion of this particular part of the Broad-sheet, see Schmaltz (2008: 150–3 (including footnote 51); 157–62).

32. Both Gouhier (1948: 226; 229) and Nadler 1991 identify the Port-Royal logicians and La Forge as defenders of this view.

33. See his De la recherche de la vérité (The Search after Truth), OC I.422–8/LO 222–5. For discussion, see Connell (1967: 194–204). It is worth noting that the Port-Royal Logic had wide readership in this period and was, at least according to one commentator, “the most influential logic text from Aristotle to the end of the nineteenth century” (Buroker 2017: Introduction).

While appeal to a nomological principle can explain how the mind brings the appropriate idea before itself given the relevant sensory experience, thinkers who advance the Active Mind model must also address the precise nature of the creative power of the mind. When the mind causes an idea to be present to itself, how exactly does this happen? Amo is not explicit about how he understands the creative power of the mind. There are, however, options for what Amo could mean by the creative power of the mind that make sense with the interpretation I am offering. One particularly interesting option, which is suggested by his account, is that the mind actualizes ideas that it contains in potentiality when it stands in the appropriate relation to an occasional cause. To see how this option works, we return to Amo’s employment of precognition.

Beyond including it in the Argument from Rational Action above, Amo says nothing more about what a precognition is, or how he wishes his reader to understand its role in his system. We know, however, that a precognition cannot be an innate idea for Amo. For, as noted above, he takes nothing to be in the intellect prior to it being in sensation. However, it is possible that Amo takes a precognition to be a potentiality in the mind. This potentiality would not be something in the intellect, but merely something in the intellect that is possible. On this view, a precognition is not a mental content in the intellect prior to the occasional bodily cause. Rather, it is a potentiality in the intellect that the mind is intrinsically capable of actualizing, but only if it stands in the correct non-efficient causal relation to a body. Taking the mind to contain potentialities but not innate ideas is precisely the view that La Forge outlines in his defense of Active Mind Occasional Causation:

But ideas are acquired and are not innate if by this word ‘innate’ is meant that they are in the substance of the soul as in a reservoir, in the way one arranges pictures in a gallery to look at them when one wishes. For there is none of them in particular which needs to be actually present in our mind which, since it is a substance which thinks,
cannot have anything actually present without being aware of it. That is why they are contained in the mind only in potency and not in act, in approximately the way in which shapes are contained in a piece of wax. (1997: 96)

On this model, the mind causes the relevant potentiality or precognition to be realized on the occasion of a particular experience of the body. While the power of the mind to realize a potentiality might be understood as an innate productive power, another model is suggested by Amo’s comments. Recall that the Argument from External Compulsion allows for the possibility of the mind being compelled to act while nevertheless retaining its status as spontaneous. In what could such compulsion consist? Taking seriously the possibility of spirit-spirit communication, as outlined in the Argument from Communication*, it is plausible that Amo takes the human mind to be compelled by God via the non-efficient communication of properties or effects conducive to creation to realize a potentiality and thus bring before itself an idea appropriate to the occasional causal stimulus of the body.

To sum up, while I agree with Smith that Amo holds that there is both no mind-body efficient causation and that the mind is the efficient cause of its ideas, I disagree that these commitments align Amo with Leibniz on the question of how to explain the phenomenon of ideation. Because Amo holds that spirit-spirit communication is possible, that there are no innate ideas, and that the body plays a robust (though non-efficient transent) causal role in ideation, a model other than a Leibniz-style pre-established harmony is required. I have outlined one such model, Active Mind Occasional Causation, which accommodates these other features of Amo’s account.

2. Conclusion

Amo’s engagement with the problem of heterogeneity shows how, at least on his view, Descartes falls into inconsistency when he argues that in the mind-body union, mind acts on and is acted upon by the body. Whatever we make of Amo’s critique of Descartes, his defense of the complete apathy of the mind reveals a philosophical system that deserves our attention. In response to the question of how Amo understands the nature of the “tight link” between mind and body in light of the mind’s apathy, I have suggested that we understand the link in terms of the Active Mind Occasional Causation view of ideation. This view takes seriously Amo’s commitment to the efficient causal power of the mind, the possibility of God’s communication with and compulsion of the human mind, as well as the claim that there is nothing in the intellect that is not first in the senses. Who Amo’s sources might be for this model of causation, how it relates to his 18th century German context, and how it intersects with other elements of his philosophical system are questions to be explored. It is my hope that the foregoing discussion demonstrates that these questions, and by extension, Amo’s writings more broadly, deserve our attention.  

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